Chapter II

The Study of Estrangement in *Far From the Madding Crowd*

The novel *Far From the Madding crowd* is a tragic-comedy. Its title is ironical. The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* comes from Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard": "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, their sober wishes never learned to stray; along the cool sequestered value of life they kept the noiseless tenor of their way." By alluding to Gray's poem, Hardy evokes the rural culture that, by Hardy's lifetime, had become threatened with extinction at the hands of ruthless industrialization. His novel thematizes the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world. But it is not the noiseless tenor of the country forefathers that is treated in the novel. In one way the extract from the elegy conforms to the spirit of the novel. In one way the extract from the elegy conforms to the spirit of the novel. It is in the novel that the Wessex country and characters are introduced to the public for the first time.

*Far From the Madding Crowd* symbolizes Hardy's desire for painting the life of poor peasants in the Wessex countryside. He explained his new approach to the countryside in an article published in *The Forum* in 1888. He prefers the bucolic life to the life of the madding crowd in big cities. It is exactly true of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. It is wonderful Painting of the landscape of Wessex. Hardy has laid down the foundation of his art in this novel. The fatalistic view of life, the play of circumstances and incidents, the role of irony in human life are so well combined, that *Far From the Madding Crowd* becomes the harbinger of great novels – *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of D’Urbervilles*. It is in this novel that Hardy strikes a new note of new realism. The novel shows a defiant spirit of revolt against the literary fashions of the age; it is the beginning of the Regional Novel Known as the Wessex novel. The word Wessex is introduced for the first time in the novel. Wessex is that
part of England which includes Dorset and other countries to the North and West of it. The whole of the area has been pictorially described in this novel. The powers of the pictorial art of Hardy have come into full play. The novel is full of the most pictorial description, one of which is the description of Norcombe Hill in the beginning of the novel, which portrays their customs, traditions and the habits of the people. References are made also to farming, harvesting, hay making and bee-keeping and transactions of the market. The presentation of the country-side is so superb, that we can form a realistic picture of Wessex region in our imagination.

*Far From the Madding Crowd* begins a new chapter in the career of Hardy. His philosophy, his art of characterization and his delineation of the rustic life of Wessex, all impart a unique place to the novel. It made Hardy's name as a novelist, and so paved the way for greater things to come. The plot is laid among the shepherds and small farmers of the village of Weatherbury. Hardy himself explains the situation of the village in the preface to the novel, "Moreover the village called Weatherbury wherein the scenes of the present story of the series are for the most part laid would perhaps be hardly discernible by the explorer, without help, in any existing place now - a- days; though at the time, comparatively recent at which the table was written, as sufficient reality to meet the descriptions, both of backgrounds and personages might have been traced easily enough." (FFMC 4)

Bathsheba Everdene is a poor girl who comes to the village of Weatherbury-with household goods in a wagon. Gabriel Oak, a bachelor and a farmer notices the beautiful maid at the turn pike gate where the wagon stops for the payment of taxes. There are haggling over two pence. The farmer Oak pays two pence to the Gate keeper and the wagon is allowed to pass. Bathsheba does not speak a word. She looks at farmer Oak with little indifference, Gabriel finds Bathsheba full of vanity. But the farmer is full of romantic love for her. Oak
meets Bathsheba again while she is riding a horse and performing some feat of bodily exercise.

   At first the girl is thrilled at the idea of having a piano and the other small comforts which Gabriel can provide but she finally decides that she will be bored with married life. One night Gabriel loses his flock of sheep because a dog had become excited and had driven them over a cliff. From this loss, he soon loses his entire farm and is forced to travel about seeking employment elsewhere. Meanwhile, Bathsheba has inherited a farm in the vicinity from her uncle. One night her barn catches fire and the man who rushes from the road to help put out the flames is Gabriel. He becomes her hired man. Bathsheba's beauty and prosperity attracted many suitors among who was the aristocratic William Boldwood. But suddenly, a gay young sergeant Troy comes upon the scene and Bathsheba is swept off her feet. Even at their wedding supper, when sergeant Troy becomes hopelessly drunk, Bathsheba realizes that she has made a poor choice.

   Gabriel Oak has watched the suitors come and go, and even after the object of his love has married the worthless soldier, he continues to work patiently for his mistress. Bathsheba gradually learns that sergeant Troy has had other affairs and one girl has just died, after having given birth to his baby. Finally, Troy leaves Bathsheba and the farm. A report is circulated that he has been drowned. William Boldwood enters the scene again and Bathsheba promises to marry him at the end of seven years when Troy would be legally declared dead and she would be free to marry. At a Christmas Eve party to celebrate the decision, Troy suddenly appears dead drunk. Boldwood shoots him. He is tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. Bathsheba is
prostrate with grief and gradually come to realize that she had erred long before in not accepting the faithful Gabriel. When Gabriel decides to leave the vicinity, she comes to his cottage and offers herself to him in marriage. The vain and beautiful Bathsheba at last finds contentment and peace with the man she had at first considered commonplace and unattractive. Obsessed by Bathsheba, Boldwood ends up killing Troy. Hardy elucidates that romantic passion is a dangerous, heartbreaking illusion. However, unlike some of his later novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* ends happily. The reader is left with the feeling that both Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak have achieved a relationship based on equality and mutual respect. Like a lot of comedies, *Far from the Madding Crowd* ends with a wedding between two lovers who've always belonged together. Hardy puts a sober spin on this kind of ending, though, when he reminds us that Bathsheba *likes* Gabriel more than *loves* him. More than that, we notice that the narrator is quick to tell us that Bathsheba isn’t ready to laugh with joy at what’s happened, since her experiences have hardened her to the point that she doesn’t feel much pleasure anymore.

The novel also contemplates the relationship between luck, or chance, and moral responsibility. While some characters, like Gabriel, are always responsible and cautious, others, like Sergeant Troy, are careless and destructive. Hardy was very much influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin, who maintained that the development of a biological species-and, by extension, of human society and history is shaped by chance and not by the design of a god.

<http://www.m.sparknotes.com/.../madding crowd/section.../>

Another theme is the danger and destruction inherent in romantic love and marriage; Hardy exposes the inconsistencies, irrationalities, and betrayals that often plague romantic relationships. Bathsheba begins the novel as an independent woman, but by falling in love with Troy, she nearly destroys her life. Similarly, Hardy presents us with many
couples in which one partner is more in love than the other, and he shows what disastrous events result from this inequality.

Although *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a conventional Victorian fiction, and contains no major technical innovations, yet its literary affinities with twentieth century fiction are noticeable. Without awareness of these affinities, the novel's emotional power and artistic complexity would not be duly appreciated. Each of the five major characters Bathsheba Everdene, Gabriel Oak, Farmer Boldwood, Fanny Robin and Sergeant Troy suffers from isolation, desolation and loneliness. These characters are isolated not only by their unhappiness but also by their inability to understand and respond to one another. Three of the major characters of *Far from the Madding Crowd* - farmer Boldwood, Fanny Robin and sergeant Troy end their lives in madness to death. Recent critics have discussed the novel as Hardy's contribution to the pastoral tradition (LJ 402-405), but they have largely ignored one of its central themes, equally prominent in Hardy's entire works, the complexity of human isolation and estrangement.

This novel is a satire on the spite of the great *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* of Gray. Here the poet propounds the idea that the village people-farmers and land labourers are contented, sober people and they live in great serenity and peace of mind. Hardy presents a picture of the farmers which is in complete contrast to that presented in the elegy by Gray. Here the three farmers Troy, Boldwood and Gabriel Oak fall victim of the charm of farm-owner Bathsheba. A realistic picture of the rural life has been presented on a very large canvas by Hardy. The tragic events and incidents of the triangular love have been very emotionally described by Hardy. Thus love at first sight between Oak and Bathsheba succeeds.

*Far from the Madding crowd* has an interesting gripping plot. We read the story from chapter breathlessly. We are emotionally involved in the fortunes and vicissitudes
of various characters. The incidents are full of suspense so that the reader feels a strong urge to know what happens next. Love is the central and pervading subject matter in the novel, hence the novel has constant source of interest for the reader. Different types of man’s love for women are described leading to different results. Indeed, Hardy is a very successful maker of plots. The story abounds in dramatic scenes and situations. Many incidents are merely unforgettable. Bathsheba’s encounter with Troy, Boldwood’s vehement declaration of the love, the demonstration of the sword play, Bathsheba’s drive to bath at night are so sensational that the readers goes through them with utmost interest. Troy is filled remorse and repentance at the sight of the dead body of Fanny that he treats Bathsheba harshly and leaves Weatherbury for good. Thus the scenes and situations are most arresting. By joining together the incidents and situations, Hardy emerges as a supreme craftsman of plot in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Another beauty of the novel is the portrayal of characters. Although the characters in *Far From the Madding Crowd* are common people—farmers, labourers, rustics and village folk, yet through them Hardy has described some primal forces of human nature. Hence they become the living characters. They live for all times and all climbs. Every character has been so drawn that we can understand his or her basic traits. Thus Bathsheba’s character of a heroine has been painted in all its shades and facets. Similarly the character of the Gabriel Oak has been portrayed very realistically. Realism of Hardy finds expression in character creation. Heredity and environment play their potent part in the shaping of human character. Realistic character tends to become types. In Boldwood we have a typical English farmer who is full of temper and ire. The rustic characters, Joseph Poorgrass and others are made to live in the pages of the novel. Almost all the characters portrayed by Hardy in the novel are true to life. The readers can share their feelings, passions and their sorrows. *Far From the Madding Crowd* is one of the earliest novels of Hardy, yet it illustrates Hardy’s basic thoughts about human destiny. Hardy’s belief is that man is born to suffer. Oak’s
destiny plays its destructive role. His hopes of becoming an independent prosperous shepherd farmer turn to dust. His love for Bathsheba remains unfulfilled for a long time. Fanny’s end is most tragic.

Hardy believed in a pessimistic world. Man is simply the toy in the hands of nature. In the novel all the characters suffer. They suffer partly on account of their own faults and follies and partly on account of adverse circumstances. The element of chance which plays most dominant role in later novels is present in this novel also. Often it is an unseen accidental happening which causes the unhappiness of the character in the novel. The novel shows Hardy’s belief in cruel or hostile fate. The only persons who are happy in the novel are the rustic who have no wishes or aspirations. Hardy believes that the state of desirelessness is the only way to happiness. Hardy is a pessimist but he is not a cynic. He does not hate mankind. Although the novel has got a happy ending, Bathsheba is married to Gabriel Oak, but the various characters have gone through tragic circumstances. Bathsheba marries the worthless soldier Troy. But soon she finds that he has had other affairs with another woman. Troy leaves Bathsheba and she begins to love Boldwood. On the day of their marriage, Troy appears dead drunk. Boldwood shoots him. He is tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. Bathsheba is with grief, gradually comes to realize that she had erred long before in not accepting the faithful Gabriel. So she offers herself in marriage to Gabriel. Thus the tragedy is changed into comedy. The Vain and beautiful Bathsheba at last finds happiness and peace with the man she had at first considered commonplace and unattractive. Hardy had succeeded in combining pastoral richness with furious passions and thwarted purpose. While most of the novels of Hardy are tragic; *Far From the Madding Crowd* ends with happy marriage of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba. In spite of a sombre and dark view of life, Hardy does not miss an element of humour in lives of the characters. The best form of humour is provided by the rustics who are present in almost all the novels of Hardy. But in this novel, the background is
rural; characters are village folk, farmers and rustics. These two humorous incidents and situations provide humour to the reader which relieves the boredom and pessimistic picture of life. In the novel, the rustic interludes are many and they are full of humour and fun. In the very beginning of the novel we come to know that Weatherbury folk are as hardy, merry, thriving wicked a set as any time in the whole country. The most entertaining passage in the rustic interludes is undoubtedly those in which we get glimpses of such outsiders as Coggan’s first wife Charlotte or Bathsheba’s parents. Besides, humour is provided by many remarks and comments made by Hardy in the course of the narration. The element of humour relieves the tension of the story which is, on the whole, one of the sorrow and suffering.

The critics have praised prose style of Hardy. He has superb command over English language. His description of landscape, hills, heaths, valleys and villages are masterly and wonderful. Even in the portrayal of human characters his language is beautiful and elegant. Another very impressive quality of Hardy’s style is his concreteness and preciseness. Whatever he describes, he presents a very correct picture of it. *Far From the Madding Crowd* provides many examples where Hardy has described scenes, incidents, landscape and places with a perfect verisimilitude. Nothing is redundant or unnecessary in his prose, so reader can take away any word and phrase from his description without some loss or harm to the meaning. We have in the novel the use of dulcet piping of Gabriel and the bass of Boldwood. The loving detail of the scenes is combined with images of music, beauty, peace and pastoral life. In this novel, Hardy is at ease more totally in command of his material. There are some visible faults in the composition of the novel. A reading of the novel shows that Hardy relies too much on accidents for the furtherance of the plot. Then some of the characters do not seem to be life like. We do not like Oak’s doglike constancy. Then there are some faults of style-clumsiness and angularities. When the novel was published it was very much appreciated. Critics hailed the novel as a brilliant piece of art. Hardy has described
events and incidents with sympathy and sensitiveness. The style blemishes can passed over if we keep our view on character-reaction. Passionate, wilful, charming, Bathsheba compels our attention and wins our admiration. Some critics have criticized Hardy with projecting prosaic reality in his novels.

This subject matter is related to the village folk. H.C. Duffin has given very appreciative response to this criticism. He says, "By choosing his characters from the plebian and labouring orders, he places them under the primal curse of man, the necessity of working for a living. The gain is great. There is a certain grim satisfaction in finding hare as in life, the primary assumption of a relentless struggle for existence that binds its victims within violable bonds, so that when trouble comes there is no fairy flight of escape". (HCD 236)

As a matter of fact, the major characters of Far from the Madding Crowd are not all estranged in the same degree, but they form a group in which Hardy explores different kinds and degrees of estrangement. At one extreme stand Farmer Boldwood and Fanny Robin, Who are completely destroyed, one mentally and the other bodily. Farmer Boldwood is apparently alienated from his farm and from himself through his obsessive pursuit of Bathsheba and ends up as a murderer declared insane by the law. Before the receipt of Bathsheba's valentine he is, as Liddy says, "a hopeless man for a woman". Boldwood makes himself a hermit living in severe conditions because he is unaware of the complexity of his own nature. When he receives Bathsheba's valentine, he suddenly perceives his self-estrangement and in his insistence on altering the circumstances which he has hitherto accepted, he loses all sense of proportion. Bathsheba might be justified in sending her thoughtless valentine as an answer to his indifference and lack of interest in her at a time when she is admired by all farmers, but Boldwood's reaction to this valentine can hardly be described as "natural". This shattering
effect of the valentine on Boldwood's outwardly tranquil existence is dealt with in the first twenty three chapters until the appearance of Sergeant Troy in chapter twenty four.

The character of Boldwood marks an important early stage in Hardy's development as a novelist. The treatment of this character shows Hardy's increasing interest, already demonstrated in *Desperate Remedies* and *A pair of Blue Eyes*, in complex, disturbed and alienated personalities. It is simply a study of the development of insanity. The treatment is sometimes inconsistent and inadequate to present the psychological complexities; but by the time of *Jude the Obscure* Hardy found more effective ways of exploring his insights into neuroses. In Boldwood we have an attempt, though of less magnitude, at a similar theme. Boldwood becomes obsessed by a woman whose strongest sentiment for him cannot go beyond respect:

I feel (he says) - almost too much - to think .... my
life is not my own since I have beheld you clearly ....
my life is a burden without you. (FFMC 159)

Instead of expanding his universe, love paradoxically limits it. Boldwood comes to define his own existence in terms of a single emotion; and when his love is frustrated by Bathsheba’s marriage to Troy, his entire universe collapses. In despair he murders his rival, but he has already destroyed himself, Boldwood's apparent self-discipline is a characteristic of a twentieth-century man, whose calm and even dull surface conceals the possibility of turbulent life. He appears in the early part of the novel a saddened, somewhat embittered and lonely figure.

On receiving Bathsheba's message, he moves rapidly and suddenly from one extreme to another, the intensely reserved ascetic becomes the intensely passionate lover. Furthermore, his love for Bathsheba as a stable, constant and reliable condition is doubtful compared to Oak's. Oak’s declaration of his love for Bathsheba and his proposal to her,
despite her discouraging reaction, reveals his powers of endurance and constancy, unlike Boldwood in terms of utter weakness and dependence. Boldwood, in fact, is torn between an idealized passion nourished by isolation and ignorance on the one hand and sensual preoccupation with the details of her body on the other; the very structure of jealousy which he later suffers is the physical obsession:

He saw her black hair, her correct facial curves and profile, and the roundness of her chin and throat. He saw then the side of her eyelids, eyes, and lashes, and the shape of her ear. Next he noticed her figure, her skirt and the very soles of her shoes. (FFMC 149)

This aspect of his personality is of utmost importance to an understanding of Boldwood. He is a man who has fiercely repressed his sexual instincts; Hardy calls him "the bachelor", "the celibate" and stresses the rigidity of his behaviour as he passes:

Bathsheba on the road after the market:

The farmer had never turned his head once, but with eyes fixed on the most advanced point along the road, passed as unconsciously and abstractedly as if Bathsheba and her charms were thin air. (FFMC 126)

Just before Boldwood proposes to Bathsheba for the first time, Hardy gives us a clearer analysis of the disturbance in Boldwood’s life:

There was a change in Boldwood's exterior from its former impossibleness; and his face showed that he was now living outside his defences for the first time and with a fearful sense of exposure. It is the usual experience of strong natures when they love. (FFMC 154)
The imagery, as so often in Hardy plays an important part in establishing in a visual way the nature of the character. The images of a "stronghold", of a man "living outside his defences", of "violent antagonistic forces" help to make visible Boldwood's interior struggle and the strength of the barriers he has built around his emotions. Hardy's attempts to show Boldwood's mind at work, after receiving the valentine, indicate a profound insight into the conscious. It is significant that in the midst of his visions about the unknown woman, Boldwood studies himself closely in the mirror. Hardy always stresses the characteristic self-absorption of neurotic people; here, Boldwood seems to be afraid that he is fading away - he sees himself as "wan", "insubstantial", with vacant eyes. This is in complete contrast with the simple vanity which Bathsheba shows when she, too, contemplates herself in a looking-glass. Later, Hardy emphasizes Boldwood's self-absorption more strongly when he and Gabriel are in despair over the marriage of Bathsheba and Troy. Gabriel is a stable, well-balanced man, even at times of utter misery. Boldwood remains totally wrapped up in himself, oblivious of all externals. By this technique of contrast, so characteristic of Hardy's structuring of his novels, Hardy is able to stress the neurotic nature of Boldwood.

Watching Bathsheba trade with a dashing young farmer, Boldwood's first impulse was "to go and thrust him between them. "Boldwood grew hot down to his hands with an incipient Jealousy" (FFMC 150). It is this jealousy which makes him shoot Sergeant Troy at the end of the novel. Thus even before Boldwood speaks to Bathsheba, he has taken the first step on his way toward self-destruction:

The insulation of his heart by reserve during these many years, without a channel of any kind for disposable emotion, had worked its effect. It has been observed more than once that the causes of love are chiefly subjective, and Boldwood was a living testimony
to the truth of the proposition. No mother existed to absorb his devotion, no sister for his tenderness, no idle ties for sense. He became surcharged with the compound, which was genuine lover’s love…

(FFMC 154)

Boldwood's first words to Bathsheba when he went to propose to her during the sheep-washing scene reveal his anomie and his sense of the pain of existence without her. It is clear that Bathsheba rejects his proposal, but he still chases her and as his hope for union with her waxes and wanes, his anomie intensifies because she becomes the sole purpose of his existence. Boldwood’s hopes are frustrated when Bathsheba becomes fascinated by Sergeant Troy. This pattern of hope and despair is repeated in the novel after the apparent drowning of Troy.

.'O Bathsheba - have pity upon me!' Boldwood burst out. 'God's sake, Yes - I am come to that low, lowest stage - to ask a woman for pity! Still, she is you - she is you' .... I am beyond myself about this, and am mad .... I am no stoic at all to be supplicating here; but I do supplicate to you. I wish you knew what is in me of devotion to you; but it is impossible, that. In bare human mercy to a lonely man, don't throw me off now! (FFMC 233)

After begging Bathsheba’s pity, he mourns the loss of his self-respect and public standing, and then curses sergeant Troy. He seems to experience the world as wholly estranged, he first despairs and considers his own death.

Now the people sneer at me - the very hills and sky
seem to laugh at me till I blush shamefully for my
folly. I have lost my respect, my good name, my
standing - lost it, never get it again. Go and marry
your man - go on. You may as well. I have no further
claim upon you. As for me, I had better go somewhere
alone, and hide - and pray. I loved a woman once. I am
now ashamed. When I am dead they'll say, Miserable love
- sick man that he was. Heaven - heaven - if I had got
jilted secretly, and the dishonour not known, and my,
position kept! But no matter, it is gone, and the woman
not gained. Shame upon him - shame'. His unreasonable
anger terrified her, and she glided from hill,... (FFMC 236)

Boldwood is unable to see anything outside himself. On two occasions, by a mixture
of bullying and pleading, he extracts promises from her. She is reluctant and obviously does
what he asks out of pity and guilt. His reaction to this unhappiness of the woman makes him
passionate in love and says "I’m happy now". Such self - absorption is almost total.

Hardy shows brilliantly, through the disaster to his stacks, how Boldwood's
estrangement restricts his ability to cope with the normal demands of life. Boldwood had
been a highly farmer, but as his balance becomes more and more disturbed, he becomes less
able competent to grapple with external problems. His neglect of the stacks, dramatically
contrasted with Gabriel's fight to save Bathsheba's shows effectively his mental derangement,
loss of interest in the outside world and inhibition of all activity. On numerous occasions
before the shooting of Troy, Boldwood’s tendency to self-destruction is markedly shown.
After he fails in his efforts to bribe Troy into leaving Bathsheba, he realizes it would be a
mistake to kill his rival, as he had threatened; then he considers it far better to kill himself.
Thus ends Boldwood's tragic journey towards self-destruction. But there still remains the central question of the farmer's moral responsibility for shooting Troy and his attempt to kill himself. That Boldwood was insane when he shot Troy was generally believed:

The conviction that Boldwood had not been morally responsible for his later acts now became general. Facts elicited previous to the trial had pointed strongly in the same direction, but they had not been of sufficient weight to lead to an order for an examination into the state of Boldwood's mind. It was astonishing, now that a presumption of insanity was raised, how many collateral circumstances were remembered to which a condition of mental disease seemed to afford the only explanation - among others, the unprecedented neglect of his corn stacks in them previous summer. (FFMC 407, 8)

Gabriel Oak, whose judgement is known for its correctness throughout the novel, tells Smallbury that he cannot honestly say that he believes Boldwood was out of his mind when he shot Troy. Whatever the answer, Hardy certainly succeeds in creating a sense of what it is like to be estranged. In Boldwood's case love destroys the mind; in that of young Fanny Robin it destroys the body. Boldwood's life ends in the loneliness of insanity or suicide, that of Fanny in the loneliness of death. Fanny's acute suffering is caused by her isolation from society represented by sergeant Troy, in the first place. Fanny's prime aim was to get united with Troy; when she failed, she suffered until she died. If Boldwood's tragedy lies in his anomic nature, Fanny's tragedy lies in a society represented by Troy. When Fanny tried to "Connect", Troy tried to "disconnect". Fanny is presented chiefly as a victim of sergeant Troy's infidelity. Our sympathy is guided towards her in each of her brief appearances. When Gabriel Oak first meets her, we are told:

Gabriel's fingers alighted on the young woman's wrist.
It was beating with a throb of tragic intensity. He had
frequently felt the same quick, hard beat in the
femoral artery of his lambs when over driven. (FFMC 87)

Fanny Robin becomes an exile from the little world of Weatherbury, wandering
between Casterbridge and Melchester in the vain hope that Troy will marry her. Her few
appearances in the novel are characterized by her utter solitude. Until she breaks down on the
steps of Casterbridge union-house, she is never presented in the context of human society. At
the Barracks, she remains outside in the snow and darkness, separated by the river.

Fanny's painful isolation culminates in her superhuman efforts to reach Casterbridge
Union - house without assistance. Fanny on Casterbridge Highway is reminiscent of King
Lear raging on the heath. The Scene indeed affects us because it is so powerful an expression
of the theme of the human isolation with which the novel, and Hardy’s works in general, is
chiefly preoccupied. Fanny's terrible isolation gives her a larger significance: It makes her an
unforgettable image of suffering humanity. As she drags herself along Casterbridge Highway
accompanied only by a benevolent dog, her sense of loneliness is heightened by the absence
of human society of which she is in great need. The distant lights of the town, the crutches
and the milestones are symbols of the human world which is tantalizingly far. The point that
Hardy brilliantly drives home is that Fanny’s struggle, in her desperate trip through the night
to reach the Casterbridge Union - house before she collapses, succeeds only because a dog
strangely appears to help her. The description of the dog is generalized, separating him from
any particular breed and elevating him to something near the force of nature.

The significance of the dog appears at the end of the journey when the attendant at the
Union-house stones away the only friend that nature has given Fanny. What is more
agonizing is that human society deserts Fanny in death as well as in life. The driver of her
funeral cortege, Joseph Poorgrass, leaves the dead girl alone in the foggy wood while he goes
to drink in the Buck's Head Inn. The description of the natural setting through which Fanny's body was passing gives the impression of sympathy with Fanny.

It was a sudden overgrowth of atmospheric fungi which had their roots in the neighbouring sea, and by the time that horse, man, and corpse entered Yalbury Great wood, these silent workings of an invisible hand had reached them... The air was an eye suddenly struck blind ... There was no perceptible motion in the air, not a visible drop of water fell upon a leaf of the beeches, birches, and firs ... The trees stood in an attitude of intentness...A startling quiet overhung all surrounding things... (FFMC 310)

It is a description, reminiscent of the woodlanders, reaches its climax with the condensed fog dropping from the trees onto the coffin:

The fog had by this time saturated the trees, and this was the first dropping of water from the over brimming leaves. (FFMC 311)

Fanny's coffin scene represents the emotional climax of the novel, for it is here that a new turn in Bathsheba's moral education takes place. The shocking discovery that the coffin contained Fanny and her child causes her final isolation from Troy. Bathsheba, at the height of her pride, begins to perceive the bitter truth about her husband, and her compassion for Fanny turns to self-pity. She even contemplates suicide. Bathsheba’s rise to humility starts from this scene. From this hour forwards, Bathsheba is no longer the proud, over-confident girl of her youth. Troy enters. The husband and wife confront each other. He kisses the dead Fanny. It is at this crucial point that Bathsheba’s feelings are defined:
At the sight and sound of that, to her, unendurable act, Bathsheba sprang towards him. All the strong feelings which had been scattered over her existence since she knew what feeling was, seemed gathered together into one pulsation now. The revulsion from her indignant mood a little earlier, when she had meditated upon compromised honour, forestallment, eclipse in maternity by another, was violent and entire. (FFMC 326)

Troy turns on Bathsheba in feigned fury: the arguments he proffers are deeply-rooted in hypocrisy and deception:

Ah! don't taunt me, madam. This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than ever you were, or are, or can be.

If Satan had not tempted me with that face of yours, and those cursed coquetries, I should have married her

"but it is all too late! I deserve to live in torment for this.... You are nothing to me - nothing

" A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage.

I am not morally yours. (FFMC 327)

Troy, as a matter of fact, is a deceiver. He deceived Fanny and Bathsheba. Even if he seems to make amends to Fanny by planting the flowers on her grave, we are made to believe that these efforts are thwarted when the pouring of the cloudburst through the gargoyle washed away the flowers. In this particular scene, Troy is actually as isolated from human sympathy as any of his three victims - Fanny, Boldwood and Bathsheba. Troy is far from being the conceited, careless and opportunist sergeant who disturbs and corrupts the pastoral world of Weatherbury and survives his relations with Bathsheba unharmed. He is quite as
much the victim of his own complexities as Boldwood. He is even engaged in destroying himself as Boldwood was. Hardy sees the paradoxes in Troy's character from the start. One is that his love of women is mingled with fear of them.

In the novel, he both flatters and curses women, and he does finally become a lost man, though not through treating them fairly. Hardy’s awareness of Troy's isolation is indicated by his sense of time. Instead of the continuity of the past, present and future, Hardy tells us, Troy is committed to a present discontinuous with the past or with the future. Between the two extremes of conscious and almost unconscious destructive isolation represented by Boldwood, Fanny and Troy, stand two characters for which isolation ultimately becomes creative force, Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene. Instead of sapping their energies, their loneliness ultimately becomes a source of strength.

The opening image of the solitary shepherd, typically Hardyian, is one of the most memorable scenes of the novel:

He stood still after looking at the sky as a useful instrument, and regarded it in appreciative spirit, as a work of art superlatively beautiful. For a moment he seemed impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene, or rather with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man. Human shapes, interferences, troubles, and joys were all as if they were not, and there seemed to be on the shaded hemisphere of the globe no sentient being save himself; he could fancy them all gone round to the sunny side.(FFMC 50)
This is a majestic loneliness; the reader cannot fail to feel Oak's happiness in loneliness. This happy solitude on Norcombe Hill is troubled by the light from Bathsheba's lantern. Oak becomes aware of his isolation.

Oak meets numerous occasions on which crushing isolation and fatal adversities befall him and could have destroyed him completely. Oak does not either know the idealism of Boldwood or the indifference of Troy. He overcomes the fatal misfortunes and their ensuing desolation and isolation by two things; first, he observes nature well, understands it, accepts it, and does not rebel against it emotionally; second he tries to amend the evil, happening to anybody anywhere, as much as he can when he sees it. With these two things Oak can adapt himself to hostile situations and achieve his aims in the end.

The contrast of Gabriel Oak with Farmer Boldwood is particularly striking. Oak is perhaps Hardy's most impressive portrayal of a well-balanced personality. He is imperturbable in the face of catastrophe, yet he is not insensitive: he is highly sensitive to music, to nature; he can feel his whereabouts in the dark by the nature of the ground underfoot. He is an almost idealised figure, with his responsibility and trustworthiness. Though he perfectly understands Bathsheba's "prescriptive infirmity", and he falls in love with her and goes to propose to her. But she does not become the centre of his universe. When he is rejected by her, it is not the end of the world. After the loss of his sheep, a terrible catastrophe to a shepherd, he is poorer, but never inferior. He never loses his integrity or curses a jeering providence, but works hard and uses his intellect to produce the desired effect. Not only does Oak understand his world well and patiently amend its unalterable evil to achieve his goals but also he manages to keep his sobriety and self-possession in the face of the obstacles he comes across from beginning to end. Some critics, (IH 307-310) in their analyses of Oak's success, mention his sense of the value of work. Ian Gregor, for instance, says, "It is the impersonality of work ..... which Hardy uses as the counterpoint to the
isolating self - absorption of passion" (IG 56). Oak is a hard worker, but he is not alienated from his work, for he enjoys its product. He extinguishes the fire and saves the risks, he treats the bloated sheep and saves them, he protects the farm during the storm, etc.

Like Sue Bridehead deciding by remarriage to Phillotson to punish herself for the death of her children, Bathsheba almost makes up her mind to marry Boldwood as a self - imposed punishment for a rash message. Boldwood encourages, even exploits, her moral masochism by always reminding her of the message. The attempt to make reparation to Boldwood was of course thwarted by Troy's return. After the violent death of her husband, Bathsheba becomes a profoundly desolate, listless and isolated widow. Liddy describes her, "Her eyes are so miserable that she's not the same woman. Only two years ago she was a romping girl, and now she's this‖ (FFMC 409)

The beginning of Bathsheba's changing course towards Oak is suggested very cleverly when she visits the grave of Troy and hears the children singing "Lead, Kindly Light". From crushing loneliness and estrangement a new love is born in the heart of Bathsheba. Newman's hymn suggests, upon Oak's appearance on the scene, that Bathsheba hopes that he will forget the past, "pride ruled my will: remember not past years", and that she is ready to forget Troy, "which I have loved long since, and lost awhile,". The whole chapter, 56, entitled "Beauty in Loneliness" deals with Bathsheba’s isolation, particularly after Gabriel announces he will give up the management of the farm because he is thinking of leaving England:

Her life was becoming desolation. So desolate was Bathsheba this evening, that in an absolute hunger for pity and sympathy, and miserable in that she appeared to have outlived the only true friendship she had ever owned, she put on her bonnet and cloak and went down to
Oak's house... (FFMC 415,416)

When Bathsheba and Gabriel finally unite, and their isolation comes to an end, through the most intimate form of human companionship, marriage, Bathsheba and Gabriel share not passion, but that substantial affection which arises.... when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good - fellowship - camaraderie - usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, it unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes. (FFMC 419)

Although the novel ends happily, yet when we think of a novel in which three of its main characters are completely destroyed, and the remaining two suffer most of the time, we have to think again. Hardy’s delineation of people was part caricature, as with Gabriel, and part portraiture, as with the young woman whom Hardy shows through Gabriel’s eyes. Critics credit Hardy’s first profession, that of architecture, with his responsibility for his sense of form, both literary and aesthetic. This, his first successful novel, was designed to appear serially; one result of this is the inclusion of a bit of suspense at the close of each installment to keep the reader eager for the next one. Estrangement and human isolation are among the major themes which Hardy tried to attribute mainly to the transition of rural agricultural society towards the industrialization and modernism and that is exactly portrayed in the plot and the characters of Far from the Madding Crowd. Thus the theme of estrangement both the title and the theme of the novel, Far From the Madding Crowd might well entitle his whole series of Wessex novels.